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BUSICK, ELIZABETH HIGH. Construction of an Instrument to Ascertain Mothers' Understanding of the Importance of Play in Early Childhood. (1970) Directed by: Dr. Helen Canaday. Pp. 46

The importance of purposeful play in early childhood education programs is a growing concern to parents and educators. In order to better explain the significance of play in the life of a young child, leaders engaged in programs for young children must understand the concepts that parents have about play.

The primary objective of the study was to identify statements relative to children's play. A second objective was to construct a valid and reliable instrument to ascertain mothers' understanding of children's play.

In the first step of the study undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in child development classes at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro wrote descriptive statements relative to the importance of play for children. One hundred and thirty-six items were identified as adequate statements. Two panels were then used to establish content validity. Seventy items were found to be valid by these panels and a Likert-type scale named the Parents' Understanding of Play Scale (PUPS) was formed. The PUPS was administered to 30 graduate students and then to 300 mothers of young children. Two hundred and seventeen of the mothers returned the PUPS for data analysis.

A t test for unequal samples was performed using the scores from the 30 graduate students and the 217 mothers.

It was found that there was a difference between the means at a high level of confidence (t-test for samples of unequal size;  $df = 245$ ;  $t = 24.3$ ; significance at .001 level).

Three ways to establish validity were employed:

(1) a split-half reliability, (2) a test-retest, and (3) an item analysis. The Pearson product-moment coefficient correlation was .84. A test-retest reliability coefficient of .71 was found and an item analysis revealed that 38 items reached the probability level of .001.

The investigator concluded that (1) statements relative to children's play are identifiable and (2) a valid and reliable instrument can be developed to ascertain mothers' understanding of children's play.

CONSTRUCTION OF AN INSTRUMENT TO ASCERTAIN  
MOTHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN  
EARLY CHILDHOOD

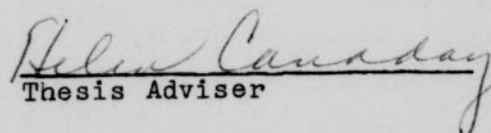
by

Elizabeth High Busick

A Thesis Submitted to  
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Approved by

  
Thesis Adviser

## APPROVAL SHEET

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of purposeful play in early childhood education programs is of growing concern to parents and educators. In order to better explain the significance of play in the life of a young child, leaders engaged in programs for young children must understand the concepts that parents have held about play. Too long the term "play" has been interpreted to mean "leisure time" or "idle and unproductive activity." Because play encompasses a wider range of spontaneous experiences, it need not mean these at all.

Play is a universal activity and is a way of learning by trial and error to cope with the actual world. It is the means through which a child gradually learns the difference between mine and yours. Frank (1968) expressed this well:

If the young child has had ample opportunities for play, he is likely to be better prepared for academic study and disciplined learning. If he has engaged in play, without interference or interruption, he learns to engage in purposeful goal-seeking activities which he, as an individual, invests with his own meanings and values as he translates his personal capacities and often unsuspected potentialities into concerted and reward-activities and relationships (p. 72).

Many mothers and teachers express the belief that a program for young children should either be oriented toward learning activities or toward non-purposeful play. Often

mothers see the two programs or ideologies as being mutually exclusive of one another. Play may be perceived as frivolous behavior with no purpose while the three R's are deemed educationally valid. Margolin (1969, p. 500) suggested that intellectualism versus play is a false dichotomy. It is important that educators and mothers realize the two types of learning activities cannot be separated in a successful and productive early childhood education program. It is Hymes' (1968) thesis that through purposeful play, the child can be freed of fears, frustrations, and tensions which are becoming more and more prevalent since the accepted fashionable trend is for young children to learn complex knowledge.

If parents are to be helped to understand the significance of play in the development of the young child, educators in early childhood education programs need some means for identifying the concepts of play held by those parents. Then, through curriculum planning, efforts could be made to help parents better understand the significance of play in the educational development of the young child. If parents understand the concepts related to play, perhaps they will take a more prominent part in trying to influence the type of programs provided for their children in their communities.

An investigation of the literature failed to reveal an instrument to measure parental understanding of play.

Such an instrument is needed not only to discover what concepts parents have about play but also to instigate empirical research in the field of play.

#### Objectives of the Study

One objective of the present study was to identify statements relative to children's play.

A second objective was to construct a valid and reliable instrument to ascertain mothers' understanding of children's play.

#### Limitations

The participants in this study were limited to mothers whose children were enrolled in early childhood programs sponsored either by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro or by a Greensboro church.

#### Assumptions

In establishing bases for this study, it was assumed by the investigator that purposeful play is a learning activity for children and that there are differing concepts of the purposes of children's play. Also, it was assumed that play takes many different forms which are both definable and observable.

#### Definitions

For the purpose of clarification, the following terms were defined for this study:

Play is a research activity or experience through which the child gathers information and manipulates both materials and people (Scarfe, 1963, p. 74; Hartley, 1952, p. 19).

Early childhood education programs are the planned and supervised week-day experiences in a learning environment for children two through five years of age.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of literature pertinent to this study is presented in this chapter. It is organized into two areas: (1) the importance of play as an element in early childhood education, and (2) making inquiries about opinions or attitudes.

#### The Importance of Play as an Element in Early Childhood Education

Preschool programs in the United States have been influenced heavily by European developments. Dating from the period of Rousseau, scholars have advocated the importance of play for the development of children (Miller, 1968, p. 13). Rousseau was one of the first to suggest a differing approach to the standard practices of that time. He emphasized that children were not miniature adults but instead were developing humans, still in a period of growth, and should be allowed to participate in lively, free-ranging activities.

In establishing the first kindergartens in Germany, Froebel conceived and used the theory that the stages of development and natural instincts of children should receive the prime considerations of educators of young children. As



Froebel's theories of early childhood education and training became known in America, centers using his techniques for young children were established in Watertown, Wisconsin; Boston, Massachusetts; and St. Louis, Missouri (Hammond, 1963, p. 48). Wills and Lindberg (1967, p. 53) described the chief aim of these first American kindergartens as being directed toward bettered child welfare rather than bettered education.

Montessori, an Italian physician, formulated still another set of theories for the education of young children. One of her contributions was that of helping educators realize that furniture and equipment should be scaled down to fit young children. During several American visits, she presented her new structured techniques of teaching young children. Her theory appeared to stress a more inflexible curriculum and less personal interaction between teacher and child.

In the 1960's many new programs came to the front in the field of education. Among those programs was the federal program to help poverty-stricken children across the United States gain a head start before entering first grade. Along with the focus on young children, greater interest was shown in educational programs involving developmental patterns. Doctors, psychologists, and educators became more aware of the problems of maturation of young children. They also became more aware of the important



role which children will play in the future of this nation. Parents, too, have become more aware of the possibilities of education occurring at earlier age levels than had previously been thought possible. President Kennedy played an important role in helping parents realize that through their children the United States would achieve its future.

As the Headstart Programs were being introduced and more people on every socio-economic level were being made aware that educational programs must exist for the period of early childhood, a number of varying philosophies developed. One group of leaders felt that programs must be oriented toward the intellectual development of the child; another group believed the emphasis should be placed on play situations in which the child could grow socially and emotionally. Many parents and educators came to the belief that the two programs were incompatible.

Play as a part of early childhood education has come into its own within the last fifty years. As early as the 1920's research about play was being reported. Hurlock (1934) was one of the first writers to present a survey of literature concerning play. She listed literature concerned with four classifications of play: (1) babyhood, (2) childhood, (3) youth, and (4) adolescence.

Britt and Janus (1941, p. 351) in their comprehensive report of literature for 1930-1939 period indicated that there were over seventy investigations reported in the literature.

The authors reported questionnaire studies concerned about play were done by Monroe, Croswell, Ravenhill, and Foster. None of these studies determined the importance adults placed on play in the early childhood curriculum. The studies were concerned with such topics as doll play and aggression.

Sutton-Smith (1967) indicated that the crux of the problem of stressing play in teaching training programs for young children may be found in the fact that generally there is not a universally accepted definition of what play is or what it does. He suggested that there is a connection between play and cognitive development but goes further to state the problem as follows: "the research literature is mainly about variables that are not necessarily central to an understanding of play itself (p. 363)."

Frank (1968, p. 433) suggested that "schools of education many times do not emphasize play because it has not been studied by current research methods and quantified findings cannot be quoted." These schools tend to emphasize a more structured program for early childhood rather than a more flexible curriculum which advocates play as a tool for learning.

Davis (1965) called for a systematic approach to play observations when he stated, "Play is the mirror of an individual's developmental pattern. It is a mirror which requires careful reading if we are to learn its true

reflection (p. 242)." Davis identified and listed four types of play: random, imitative, imaginative, and reflective (p. 243). It was further suggested that there were four elements of play helping to form personality. These are the physical and manipulative involvement, the emotions and expressions of moods, the verbal responses, and the mental impressions.

Elkind (1970) stressed the fact that much of a child's motor play is preparatory to later cognitive development. Further, he emphasized that those who deride play in the preschool ignore the fact that all play has a cognitive component and role in all creative endeavor, whether it be intellectual or artistic.

Elkind also presented four arguments that are sometimes given for having an academic curriculum instead of the traditional preschool program. Academic instruction is (a) more economical, (b) more efficient, (c) more necessary, and (d) more cognitively stimulating. He stated quite clearly that there is no preponderance of evidence that formal instruction is more efficient.

Almy (1968) pointed out that schools must provide more than a home environment can provide for spontaneous play. Two forms of play were described by Almy: (1) the type which is self-initiated by the child, and (2) the type which is an adult-prescribed activity, initiated and directed by the nature of the equipment. It is important

that the teacher use her ability and training to provide children with the proper equipment and material at the right time.

Peller (1952) also made three main points about the importance of play. She stated that playful repetition helps in the retention of knowledge and skill; play may help a child to overcome a specific fear; and the root of most play occurs when a child turns from passive to active participation in his role.

According to Senn (1945) play is a natural medium for communication in children. It permits a child to tell things about himself as a person, about his physical abilities, and about his feelings. Further opportunities for diversional and occupational play should be provided for each child in keeping with his physical, intellectual, and emotional needs.

One of the outstanding psychologists of our century, Erickson (1963), suggested that play tries to elude definition. However, he proposed the theory that "the child's play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning (p. 195)."

Hartley, Frank, and Goldenson, (1952) stated that in play the child can manipulate, organize, rapidly change and rearrange his smaller world of toys and materials; and, if given the time, materials, and opportunity to experiment in his own way, he finds himself, rights himself when he has gone astray, and

gradually learns how to get along with himself and with others in a large and complex world (p. 1).

Further, they suggested that not only will play help the child in getting along with himself and his world, but also by observing the play of a child, a teacher can help a child to correct any misconceptions of himself. Dramatic play, water play, block play and clay play should be a part of the curriculum for young children. Dramatic play should be encouraged by teachers of young children. Dramatic play has eight main functions which are important in helping the child to develop from a purely egocentric being into one that can function with other members of the society:

- (1) To imitate adults
- (2) To play out real life roles in an intense way
- (3) To reflect relationships and experiences
- (4) To express pressing needs
- (5) To release unacceptable impulses
- (6) To reverse roles usually taken
- (7) To mirror growth
- (8) To work out problems and experiment with solutions (p. 19).

In another study about dramatic play, Marshall (In Hoffman & Hoffman, 1964, p. 279) found that the child's ability to get along with his peers and his status in the nursery school group were related to the frequency with which he indulged in dramatic play.



A recent volume of the encyclopedia The Story of Life stated that the idea of play is confused in the adult mind with the type of "unwinding" recreation enjoyed as a release from work. By the time the toddler is able to occupy himself with manufactured toys, his behavior is more readily acceptable to the parent in terms of "play." However, this behavior is in fact an elaboration of earlier developmental exercises and an equally solemn matter to the child. The types of play which are typified by uproarousness and laughter are mainly those involving some release from fear from the earliest "peek-a-boo" when the baby learns that the vanishing parent is always going to return, to the tickling and romping games which dispel fear of weakness by demonstrating to the child both his own strength and the satisfactory benevolence of his opponent.

Miller (1968) stated that the frequency and amount of social play at different stages varies with habits and social background. Further the play of intelligent children has been characterized as more varied, versatile, resourceful, and mature.

#### Making Inquiries About

#### Opinions or Attitudes

The questionnaire method has been described by Van Dalen (1966) as one way to make inquiries concerning attitudes and opinions if a study is of sufficient importance



to justify asking people to take time to participate. This type of instrument is easy to administer and easy to tabulate. Van Dalen also emphasized that the investigator must evaluate the instrument for its validity (does the test measure what it claims?) and reliability (does the test consistently yield the same results?).

Other characteristics of an effective questionnaire are: the instrument must be objective; it must have a neat appearance; and it must be long enough to obtain the desired information, but not long enough to discourage people from answering thoughtfully. In addition, the questionnaire must be carefully formulated and first administered to experts in the field. After revisions are made, a pilot study should be conducted before administering the instrument to the selected sample. (Hall, 1962)

Rummel (1964) suggested that the investigator using a questionnaire meet with groups of people when they are to complete the instrument. This procedure gives the researcher an opportunity to arouse interest in the study, to avoid misunderstandings, and to eliminate the cost of mailing.

General guidelines to consider in construction of instruments for collecting data include the following:

- (a) The concept around which an idea is to be developed should be important and as closely related as possible to the objectives
- (b) Items should be expressed in precise language

- (c) There should be economy in the use of language to assure a reduction in reading time and
  - (d) Weak sentence structure should be avoided.
- (Wood, 1960, p. 46).

One means of determining opinions and attitudes is the Likert-type scale. This type scale is "a summated scale consisting of a series of items to which the subject responds (Miller, 1970, p. 92)." Miller suggested the following steps in construction of the Likert-type scale:

- (1) Gather a large number of relevant items
- (2) Administer items to a representative group of subjects
- (3) Score responses to each item in such a way that a response indicative of the most favorable attitude is given the highest score
- (4) Compute each individual's total score by adding his item scores
- (5) Analyze responses to determine which items differentiate most clearly between the highest and lowest quartiles of total scores
- (6) Form a scale from those items which differentiate best.

#### Summary

Early childhood education programs in the United States have been influenced by European scholars such as

Rousseau, Froebel, and Montessori. Play has been incorporated into programs for young children; but because there is little empirical research about the importance of children's play, there is some question in the minds of parents and educators as to its significance. Frank (1964) and Sutton-Smith (1967) indicated that programs concerned with teacher education advocated a more structured curriculum for young children for this reason.

The questionnaire method suggested by Van Dalen (1966) was one way to investigate attitudes and opinions. Miller (1970) stated that a Likert-type scale is a good method for developing such an instrument.

### CHAPTER III

#### PROCEDURE FOR THE STUDY

There were two purposes for this study: (1) to identify statements relative to children's play; and (2) to construct a valid and reliable instrument to ascertain mothers' understanding of children's play. In this chapter the development of the instrument and a description of the sample will be discussed.

#### Identifying Statements Relative to Children's Play

The first step in the development of the instrument was to gather a universe of statements related to concepts of the play of young children. Because both accurate and inaccurate statements in laymen terms were needed, it was decided that the best source of such statements would be undergraduate and graduate students involved in the study of young children and familiar with the term "concepts of children's play." During the 1970 spring semester at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro permission was granted from the instructors of Education 324, Home Economics 542, Home Economics 302, and Home Economics 522 for taking class time to have students write statements explaining their ideas of the importance of play for young children from the ages two through five years.

Each of the 200 student papers obtained were analyzed for statements concerning the importance of play and the different concepts of play. Repetitive statements and those which were not pertinent were eliminated. One hundred thirty-six different statements were identified by the investigator and an advisory committee as accurate statements about play.

The list of the 136 statements was given to a panel of 10 graduate students who were asked to classify each statement as a concept of play. All of these panel members had had work experience in preschool programs and all were in at least their second semester as a graduate student majoring in the area of Child Development and Family Relations in the School of Home Economics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The responses of the panel of graduate students were analyzed for the degree of agreement among panel members. Sixty per cent agreement among the panel members was chosen as the criterion for each statement being considered as a valid statement about play. Such agreement was reached on 98 of the 136 statements.

A second panel of 10 judges was selected to classify the statements into related groups of concepts. The panel was composed of faculty members in the Child Development area in the School of Home Economics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and from the personnel in Region II Headstart Training Center. Every member of the



panel of child development specialists had at least a master's degree and had been engaged in working professionally with young children for five or more years.

Each judge was given a set of cards on which the concepts of play were listed and was asked to sort the statements into one of five categories: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and miscellaneous concepts of play. To be retained a statement had to receive at least eighty per cent agreement among the panel of judges. Seventy statements met this criterion.

#### Development of the Instrument

The seventy remaining statements were used to construct the Likert-type scale Parents' Understanding of Play Scale (PUPS).<sup>1</sup> A Likert-type instrument provides a means whereby "right" or "wrong" answers do not have to be given. Instructions, therefore, were developed which asked for rating "each statement as to whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD)." (See Appendix A.) Further instructions directed participants to "react to each statement according to your conviction." In order that respondents would be more inclined to make a conscious selection of responses to items rather than follow a pattern in marking the responses the agreement categories

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<sup>1</sup>The writer will hereafter use the abbreviated title.



were not arranged in the same order for each statement. Items were given an arbitrary weight by the investigator ranging from four for a response of (SA) to one for a response of (SD). A table of random numbers was used to order the seventy items within the instrument.

The instrument was then administered to 30 graduate students (1) to test for clarity of items and direction and (2) to use the scores in validating the instrument. After a few items were re-worded for clarity, the PUPS was administered to a pilot group of mothers of preschool children in order to ascertain if the directions and items were understandable to these mothers. No further changes were found to be necessary.

The PUPS was distributed to teachers in the week-day early childhood education programs at Christ Methodist Church, Parkway Baptist Church, St. Francis Episcopal Church, the Demonstration Nursery Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the School of Home Economics Nursery School University of North Carolina. The teachers were told to ask mothers of all of the children enrolled in their program to fill in and return the instrument.

At some schools the mothers filled in the PUPS while attending parent education classes. At other schools, the children carried the PUPS home with an attached note asking the mothers to fill in the instrument and return it to the school on the following day.

Six weeks later the PUPS was readministered to the mothers at the two Nursery School programs of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. These scores were compared with scores of 217 mothers who originally responded to the PUPS for reliability.

#### Description of the Sample

The limitation for this study specified that participants would be mothers with a preschool child between the ages of two and five years. The preschool child was to be enrolled in the week day preschool program at Christ United Methodist Church, Parkway Baptist Church, St. Francis Episcopal Church, the Demonstration Nursery Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, or the Nursery School in the School of Home Economics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. No attempt was made to get any demographic data on the mothers.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The findings are presented in terms of the objectives of the study: (1) assembling a universe of statements about the importance of play and (2) evaluation of the developed instrument.

#### Assembling of a Universe of Statements

##### About the Importance of Play

The first objective for this study was to identify statements relative to children's play. It was found that students enrolled in upper division and graduate classes in Child Development and Early Childhood Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro were able to write 136 different statements of the importance of play.

One panel consisting of 10 graduate students in Child Development was able to reach an agreement of 60 per cent or more on the selection of 98 statements about play. A second panel of 10 specialists in the field of Child Development reached 80 per cent agreement on the placement of 70 of these statements into five specific categories of play: mental, social, intellectual, emotional, and miscellaneous. These two panels established the content validity of the seventy statements representative of accepted statements of

play organized into a Likert-type instrument to ascertain parents' understanding of play.

#### Evaluation of the Instrument

The Parents' Understanding of Play Scale (PUPS) was administered to 300 mothers of young children involved in five early childhood education programs throughout the city of Greensboro, North Carolina. A total of 217 mothers returned the PUPS to the investigator in time for data analysis.

The seventy items in the instrument were subjected to analysis. Each participant was given a score based on her response to all 70 items. The scores were obtained by weighing the items on the following scale: Strongly Agree, 4 points; Agree, 3 points; Disagree, 2 points; and Strongly Disagree, 1 point. The participants were then split at the median score into a high scoring group and into a low scoring group. For each item a four cell chi-square table was constructed showing whether participants who scored "high" or "low" on the item (also a median cut) were "high" or "low" on the total score. The results of the chi-square tests are shown in Table 1. Thirty-eight items reached the probability level of .001. The thirty-eight items reaching the desired significance level are shown in Table 2 (p. 27).

Table 1

Per Cent, Chi Square Values and Significance of the  
Responses of 217 Mothers to the Seventy Items  
of the Parents' Understanding  
of Play Scale

Item	High Total Score	Low Total Score	Chi Square	
1	59%	62%	.3	N.S.
2	62	28	26.2	***
3	48	14	28.7	***
4	58	50	1.7	N.S.
5	38	40	.2	N.S.
6	31	75	17.6	***
7	51	43	1.7	N.S.
8	81	69	4.1	*
9	66	20	46.1	***
10	71	29	37.5	***
11	61	37	13.0	***
12	63	21	39.1	***
13	48	11	35.5	***
14	86	52	28.4	***
15	54	45	1.5	N.S.
16	60	31	18.1	***
17	40	14	18.9	***
18	87	51	33.4	***
19	42	24	8.0	**

Table 1 (continued)

Item	High Total Score	Low Total Score	Chi Square	
20	73	73	.0	N.S.
21	46	44	.2	N.S.
22	30	92	87.0	***
23	49	19	22.0	***
24	85	68	8.9	**
25	83	77	1.6	N.S.
26	26	.04	20.9	***
27	53	53	.0	N.S.
28	93	86	2.5	N.S.
29	74	75	0.0	N.S.
30	29	3	28.3	***
31	53	52	.04	N.S.
32	43	12	25.6	***
33	47	10	35.0	***
34	87	84	.4	N.S.
35	58	52	.9	N.S.
36	29	6	19.3	***
37	54	10	48.0	***
38	26	6	16.0	***
39	32	7	20.8	***
40	54	19	29.0	***
41	39	8	28.0	***



Table 1 (continued)

Item	High Total Score	Low Total Score	Chi Square	
42	52	3	65.4	***
43	41	3	46.3	***
44	42	9	30.4	***
45	38	31	1.2	N.S.
46	70	40	20.0	***
47	26	5	18.4	***
48	52	8	50.0	***
49	45	6	44.0	***
50	33	3	33.7	***
51	85	75	3.4	N.S.
52	36	8	24.2	***
53	83	77	1.6	N.S.
54	29	7	17.1	***
55	39	6	33.1	***
56	94	83	6.9	**
57	91	74	10.3	**
58	18	7	5.8	**
59	53	33	9.3	**
60	95	81	10.4	**
61	49	26	11.2	***
62	89	61	22.2	***
63	40	11	24.9	***

Table 1 (continued)

Item	High Total Score	Low Total Score	Chi Square	
64	88	85	.5	N.S.
65	47	7	42.5	***
66	91	83	3.0	N.S.
67	37	8	25.0	***
68	39	104	23.3	***
69	76	77	.04	N.S.
70	47	7	42.5	***

\* =  $p < .05$

\*\* =  $p < .01$

\*\*\* =  $p < .001$

N.S. = not significant

Table 2

Thirty-eight Items Which Were  
Most Discriminating

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Play provides ways in which a child can learn about failure and how to deal with his mistakes in a positive way.

Play can stimulate curiosity.

Play is a time to use growing muscles and expanding bodies.

Play is a highly structured, regimented activity.

Play is a means of communication for young children.

Play provides an opportunity for children to learn concepts.

Play refers only to outdoor activities.

Children learn to share, to take turns, and to begin to think of others while they are playing.

Activities should be balanced so that active play and quiet play are alternated.

Play is extremely important to the total development of a child.

Play is a form of therapy.

Play is a form of self-learning for young children.

Children can learn about science and geography in play.

Play can develop leaders and followers.

Play leads to richer language development.

Play can help a child develop mental and mechanical skills.

Play is a time to try on new roles.

Play allows children to learn independence.

Play is essential for all children.

Through play, children are exposed to experiences that prepare them for interaction with others.

Table 2 (continued)

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Play can be an outlet for built-up anxieties.

Through play, children solve problems and test ideas.

Play is a means of expressing anger, anxiety, happiness and joy.

Play always has rigid rules.

Play helps children learn by experience.

Young children learn from playing together.

Play is a social experience.

Through play, children build concepts about their world--its objects and people.

Through play, children build self-confidence.

Often role playing reveals a child's innermost problems.

Play is the way in which children begin to organize, to think through ideas, to plan, and to solve problems.

Play should be taken lightly by parents.

Play is a frivolous activity which has no purpose.

Social interaction is an important aspect of play.

Play can be an emotional outlet for the "normal" child as well as the disturbed child.

Some play activities are essential for proper muscular development.

Play is important to children because it is the means by which they explore to find new ideas and objects.

The encouragement that a child receives while he is involved in play helps him to develop a good self-concept.

### Reliability

To assess the reliability of the instrument, two different methods were used. Split-half reliability was calculated by dividing the responses of each of the 217 participants into odd-even halves. The split-half coefficient of reliability was .84.

Six weeks later the PUPS was readministered to the group of 51 mothers involved in a course in parent education at the Nursery School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The scores on the two administrations of the PUPS were correlated. The obtained correlation of reliability was .71. This seems to be an adequate reliability coefficient, considering the six week time interval between tests.

### Validity

Some evidence of construct validity was obtained by comparing 30 graduate student scores against the 217 mothers' scores. It was reasoned at the time that students on the graduate level who had elected to take courses in the field of Child Development would score higher than mothers because they would have a greater knowledge of the concepts of play than mothers who probably had only a limited background. The mean, standard deviation, and number of subjects for each group are:



	Mothers	Graduate Students
Mean	124.4	148.1
Standard deviation	3.70	4.25
Number	217	30

A t-test for unequal samples was performed. The resulting t value was found to be 24.3; the difference between the means was significant at better than .001 level with 245 degrees of freedom. Although this finding does not establish the total validity of the test, it does contribute to its construct validity.

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For many years there has been some misunderstanding about the importance of play in early childhood education programs. The various programs for young children seem to be oriented either toward play or toward formal instruction. More recently educators have been aware of the importance of play in the life of youngsters, but few have done empirical research on the intellectual, social, and emotional aspects of play.

Literature points to the fact that European scholars influenced the development of early childhood education programs in the United States. It appears that schools concerned with teacher training shy away from emphasizing play because there is not enough empirical data to support their use of a less structured curriculum.

As this study was begun, it was discovered that no valid and reliable instrument was available to help in determining parental understanding of play. The development of such an instrument to ascertain the concepts held about play could make a good start in helping to encourage further research in the field. Consequently, the objectives for the study were (1) to identify statements relative to children's play and (2) to construct a valid and reliable instrument to

ascertain parents' understanding of children's play. The study was limited to mothers whose children were enrolled in early childhood programs sponsored either by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro or by a Greensboro church.

The main assumptions upon which the study was based were (1) purposeful play is a learning activity for children; (2) there are differing concepts of the purposes of children's play; (3) play takes many forms which are both definable and observable.

All steps for developing a sound research instrument were followed. A Lickert-type scale was developed which contained 70 statements relative to the importance of play for young children.

Content validity of the universe of statements in the PUPS was established in three steps. In the first step, upper division and graduate students enrolled in Child Development and Early Childhood Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro wrote descriptive statements of the importance of play for young children. In step two, the investigator and advisory committee identified 136 items as adequate statements of the concepts of play. In step three, 10 judges determined the statements which were concerned with the importance of play and 10 specialists in Child Development categorized those statements into physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and miscellaneous concepts of play. After the criteria for agreement among the panels

of judges had been applied, the remaining 70 statements were formed into the Parents' Understanding of Play Scale (PUPS). Each statement was to be rated on an agreement-disagreement continuum.

Construct validity of the PUPS was determined by comparison of the mean of the scores of a group of graduate students enrolled in Child Development and of the mean of the scores of mothers who had children enrolled in the Nursery School programs at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. It was found that there was a difference between the means at a high level of confidence (t-test for samples of unequal size;  $df = 245$ ;  $t = 24.3$ ; significant at .001 level).

Reliability of the Parents' Understanding of Play Scale was established in three ways: split-half reliability, test-retest reliability, and item analysis. The results of the tests showed that the reliability was reasonable:

(1) the Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation between the odd-even halves for the mothers was .84; (2) a test-retest reliability coefficient of .71 was found; and (3) an item analysis revealed that 38 items reached the probability level of .001.

#### Conclusions

The important conclusions from this study are as follows:

(1) Statements relative to children's play are identifiable.

(2) A valid and reliable instrument can be developed to ascertain mothers' concepts of the play of children.

(3) The Likert-type scale, the Parents' Understanding of Play Scale (PUPS), was found to be an instrument adequate for measuring mothers' understanding of the concepts of play.

(4) The reliability of this instrument and the initial evidence of its validity concerning the importance of play support the fact that it may be found useful for carrying out further investigations. Its uses have yet to be explored.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

It is recommended that more empirical research concerning the importance of play in early childhood be carried out. Educators must not only be able to discuss theoretical approaches of play but they must have empirical studies to support them.

Play in early childhood must be explored further and the concepts of play which parents have must be acknowledged. The concepts which parents have of play should be broken down into those held by the mothers and those held by the fathers. A comparison of the differences would be in order. The PUPS might be used in studying the difference in the concepts held by both parents.



The concepts of play held by mothers and others in different socio-economic levels would add to the body of knowledge about play. It also would be helpful to know understandings of play that are held by parents of only children as opposed to parents of two or more children.

Research on the importance of play would serve as a basis for studying play equipment used by children in their play activities. Research in this area would be valuable to both manufacturers of toys and equipment, as well as to educators in the field of Early Childhood Education.

The concepts of play held by mothers whose young children had preschool group experiences as compared to those concepts held by mothers whose young children had no preschool group experiences would further add to the body of knowledge about play. It would give educators insight into their task of interpreting the value of play to the lay public.

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# APPENDIX A

## PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF PLAY SCALE

Walter D. Kline

It has become increasingly more apparent that all adults do not perceive children's play in the same way. Through answering the items on this questionnaire you will help to answer the question of the importance of play in the life of a child. This study is being conducted as a part of the requirements for a Master of Science degree at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I appreciate your participating in the study.

Please read each of the statements carefully. Rate each statement as to whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD). There are no right or wrong answers, so react to each statement according to your own convictions. Work as rapidly as you can. Draw a circle around the letters following each statement that best expresses your feelings about the statement. The letters are not arranged in the same order for each statement. Be sure that you circle the letter or letters that express your convictions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Betty High Busick

1. Play is spontaneous and has no limits. . . . . SA A D SD
2. Play provides children the opportunity to act out their feelings. . . . A D SD SA
3. Play provides ways in which a child can learn about failure and how to deal with his mistakes in a positive way. . . . . D SD SA A
4. Play is the child's world . . . . . SD SA A D
5. Through play, children get a chance to escape from the real world with so many restrictions. . . . . SA A D SD
6. Play is important to young children because it is their way of learning how to act in an adult world. . . . . A D SD SA
7. Children should be forced to play . . . D SD SA A
8. Play is equally beneficial to each child . . . . . SD SA A D
9. Play can stimulate curiosity. . . . . SA A D SD
10. Play is a time to use growing muscles and expanding bodies. . . . . A D SD SA
11. Play is a highly structured, regimented activity . . . . . D SD SA A
12. Play is a means of communication for young children. . . . . SD SA A D
13. Play provides an opportunity for children to learn concepts. . . . . SA A D SD
14. Play refers only to outdoor activities. . . . . A D SD SA
15. Play is child-centered. . . . . D SD SA A
16. Children learn to share, to take turns, and to begin to think of others while they are playing . . . . SD SA A D
17. Activities should be balanced so that active play and quiet play are alternated. . . . . SA A D SD

18. Play is extremely important to the  
total development of a child. . . . . A D SD SA
19. In a play situation, a child learns  
to incorporate visual, tactile,  
auditory, and other perceptions into  
a useable form. . . . . D SD SA A
20. Play includes physical exertion or a  
high level of activity. . . . . SD SA A D
21. Play is a time to compete with other  
children. . . . . SA A D SD
22. Play is a form of therapy. . . . . A D SD SA
23. To be play, there must be interac-  
tion between two or more people . . . . D SD SA A
24. Play, for young children, is a way  
of learning the roles they will  
play in later life. . . . . SD SA A D
25. Adults should not interfere with  
children's play . . . . . SA A D SD
26. Play is a form of self-learning  
for young children. . . . . A D SD SA
27. Play is a way for a child to use  
up excess energy so that he will  
be tired enough to sleep. . . . . D SD SA A
28. Play helps the child to learn to  
live with his family. . . . . SD SA A D
29. Play is an activity to keep a child  
busy and out from his mother's feet . . SA A D SD
30. Children can learn about science  
and geography in play . . . . . A D SD SA
31. Vigorous play activities develop  
large muscles . . . . . D SD SA A
32. Play helps to develop children's  
attitudes towards others. . . . . SD SA A D
33. Play can develop leaders and  
followers . . . . . SA A D SD

- |     |   |    |    |    |    |
|-----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 34. | Play is the interaction between<br>two or more people. . . . .  | A  | D  | SD | SA |
| 35. | Play is the business of children. . . .   | D  | SD | SA | A  |
| 36. | Play leads to richer language<br>development . . . . .  | SD | SA | A  | D  |
| 37. | Play can help a child develop mental<br>and mechanical skills . . . . .   | SA | A  | D  | SD |
| 38. | Play is a time to try on new roles. . .   | A  | D  | SD | SA |
| 39. | Play allows children to learn<br>independence. . . . .  | D  | SD | SA | A  |
| 40. | Play is essential for all<br>children. . . . .  | SD | SA | A  | D  |
| 41. | Through play, children are exposed<br>to experiences that prepare them<br>for interaction with others . . . . . | SA | A  | D  | SD |
| 42. | Play can be an outlet for built up<br>anxieties . . . . .   | A  | D  | SD | SA |
| 43. | Through play, children solve<br>problems and test ideas . . . . .   | D  | SD | SA | A  |
| 44. | Play is a means of expressing anger,<br>anxiety, happiness and joy. . . . .                                     | SD | SA | A  | D  |
| 45. | Play is participating in group<br>games . . . . .   | SA | A  | D  | SD |
| 46. | Play always has rigid rules . . . . .   | A  | D  | SD | SA |
| 47. | Play helps children learn by<br>experience. . . . .   | D  | SD | SA | A  |
| 48. | Young children learn from playing<br>together. . . . .  | SD | SA | A  | D  |
| 49. | Play is a social experience . . . . .   | SA | A  | D  | SD |
| 50. | Through play, children build con-<br>cepts about their world--its<br>objects and people. . . . .                | A  | D  | SD | SA |
| 51. | In play, freedom to move about is<br>needed. . . . .  | D  | SD | SA | A  |



52. Through play, children build self-confidence. . . . . SD SA A D
53. Play always means a time to share . . . SA A D SD
54. Often role playing reveals a child's innermost problems. . . . . A D SD SA
55. Play is the way in which children begin to organize, to think through ideas, to plan, and to solve problems. . . . . D SD SA A
56. Play is a waste of time . . . . . SD SA A D
57. Play is the child's way of learning to act in an adult world. . . . . SA A D SD
58. Play provides an opportunity for the child to develop his body through active play . . . . . A D SD SA
59. Play is an activity to get a child "out of the way" . . . . . D SD SA A
60. Play helps children get rid of hostilities and anger . . . . . SD SA A D
61. Play should be taken lightly by parents . . . . . SA A D SD
62. Play is a frivolous activity which has no purpose. . . . . A D SD SA
63. Social interaction is an important aspect of play. . . . . D SD SA A
64. Play develops ethical and moral values. . . . . SD SA A D
65. Play can be an emotional outlet for the "normal" child as well as the disturbed child . . . . . SA A D SD
66. Play is the way of giving the child a feeling of success. . . . . A D SD SA
67. Some play activities are essential for proper muscular development . . . . D SD SA A

68. Play is important to children because  
it is the means by which they explore  
to find new ideas and objects . . . . . SD SA A D
69. Exact procedures stifle play. . . . . SA A D SD
70. The encouragement that a child  
receives while he is involved in  
play helps him to develop a good  
self-concept. . . . . A D SD SA